

## FORUM

# Golden age of New Haven architecture might be now

**C**ONSTRUCTION of one particular building type can occur in spurts. Look down 6th Avenue in midtown Manhattan and you'll see a parade of 1950s and 1960s slab office buildings, all seemingly marching to the same drummer. In the late 1970s and early 1980s

and another dozen or so are either being built or designed. The cost for all this construction is almost \$1.5 billion, and the physical enhancement of this decade's work will probably end up somewhere north of four million square feet of new or renovated space.

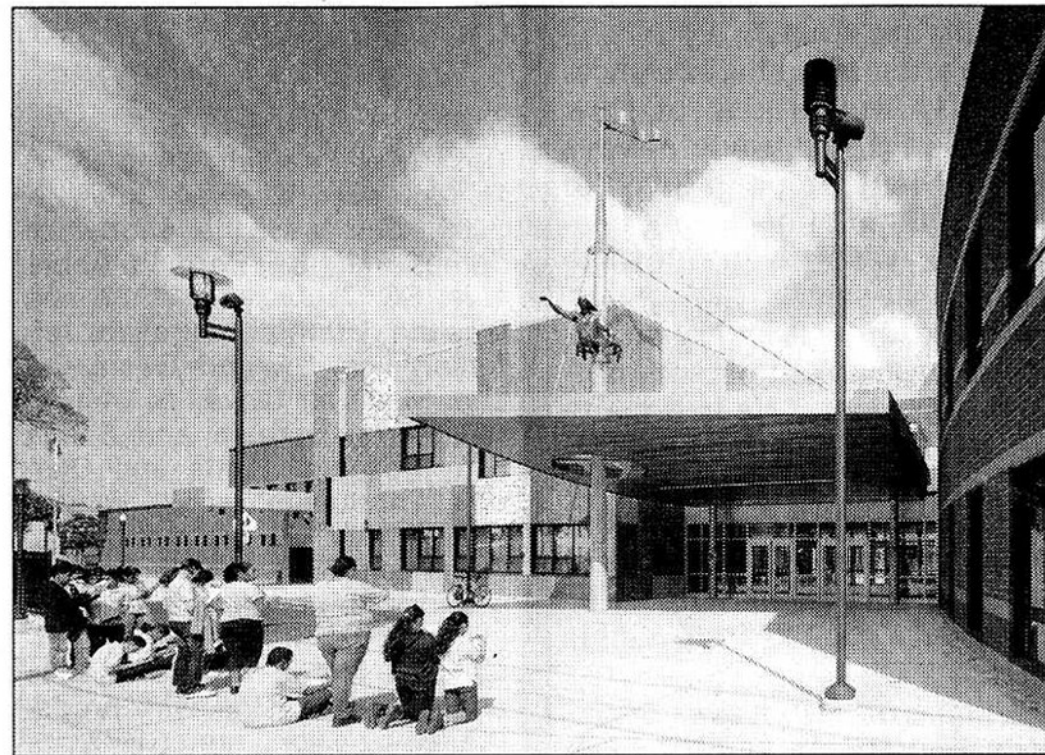
Jetsons-inspired office buildings sprouted along Interstate-95 in Stamford. In New Haven, with its diverse flock of architects always somehow in orbit around Yale University's School of

Architecture, there was a spate of firehouse construction in the 1960s and 1970s. Whether it was Robert Venturi's Dixwell fire station, Carlin, Pozzi and Millard's Whitney Avenue fire station, or Earl Carlin's central fire station on Grand Avenue, bold and expressive modern architecture found a vehicle for creation in New Haven's desire to have modernized accommodations for its fire brigades.

Now, we are engaged in an extraordinary flurry of school construction. In the past decade, almost 30 school construction projects have been completed,

Notably absent from any of these buildings are the extreme shapes like that of Roche and Dinkeloo's Lee High School, now the Yale School of Nursing, built in 1964. The present crop have also largely escaped the awkwardness of last decade's Career High School by architect Wendell Harp where each and every part of the building gets its own blue plate glass flourish.

The exceptionally thoughtful firm of Roth and Moore is creating a major addition to the streetscape of Whitney Avenue in



Woodruff/Brown Photography

**ABOVE:** People gather outside the entrance of Christopher Columbus Family Academy, an elementary school on Blatchley Avenue in New Haven designed by Svigals + Partners.

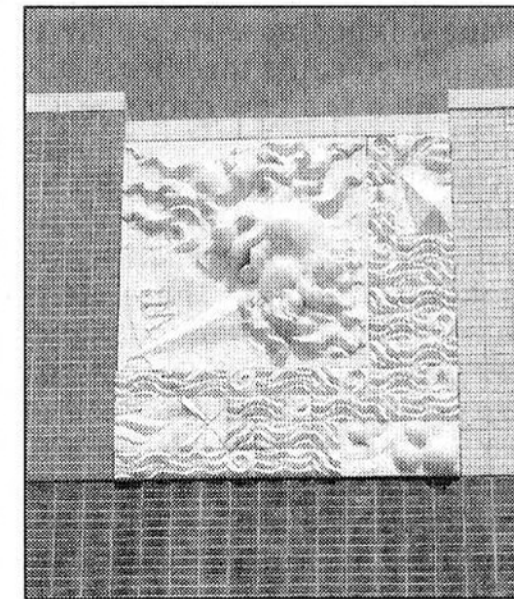
**ABOVE RIGHT:** "West Wind," a bas-relief on the school's facade.

its design for the new Worthington Hooker School now under construction on the site of the former Christian Science Church designed by Douglas Orr. As with many of Roth and Moore's buildings, it is characterized by crafty brick detailing, weaving windowscaping and precise massing.

A compliment to the crafty and careful spirit of the Hooker school is the expressive, even

playful, Christopher Columbus Family Academy by Svigals + Partners, where the building takes on an effervescent role — with zesty curves, sculpted bas reliefs and gleeful use of color.

In contrast to the focus on detailing shown in Roth & Moore's and Svigals + Partners' work is the building under construction that is on full display from Route 34, the Metropolitan Business Acad-



emy and Interdistrict Magnet School designed by the S/L/A/M Collaborative. The fairly jazzy rhythms and pumped up massing manipulations of this building seem intended to grab attention as you zoom by on the immediately adjacent highway. Its shape reaches out for attention.

The Roberto Clemente School by Kagan Architects and Planners promises to be an upbeat, modern structure with some fairly dynamic detailing. However, the new school building with the largest impact on New Haven is the new Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School on College Street by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects. Ironically, unlike Svigals work, this building dedicated to the arts takes itself pretty seriously, and

has no visible fine arts expression woven into its design. Its extraordinary size, seemingly overwhelming an entire block, and its carefully designed window walls, enhanced by dynamic cantilevers and precise rendering of contrasting materials — brick, glass, metal, and a little stone — have made it an undeniable presence in downtown New Haven.

It's often too easy to simply categorize buildings by style. It's far more rewarding to take buildings of similar or even identical requirements — firehouses and schools, for instance — and see what different architects operating during the same time frame in very similar contexts come up with.

Whether it's the "go-go" quality of S/L/A/M Collaborative's building or the invigorated playfulness of Svigals + Partners designs, these buildings are not shy. They are not recessive. But, the attitude of making a statement, such as Lee High School, typically wears thin over time, and seldom functions as its occupants hoped it would.

*Duo Dickinson, an architect, writes about architecture and urban design for the Register. Readers may write him at 94 Bradley Road, Madison 06443. E-mail: duo.dickinson@snet.net.*